

**“LIKE SPLITTING A MAN UP HIS BACKBONE”:  
THE TERRITORIAL DISMEMBERMENT OF UTAH, 1850-1896\***

by

WILLIAM P. MACKINNON

William P. MacKinnon is an independent historian from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. His articles, essays, and book reviews on the American West and Utah's territorial period have appeared in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* and more than twenty-five other journals since 1963, the year in which he first joined Utah State Historical Society. This article has evolved from exploratory papers presented at the 1995 Utah Governor's Conference on History and Heritage and the Mormon History Association's 2002 annual conference in Tucson.

Although the process by which the congressional Compromise of 1850 swept aside the Provisional State of Deseret and replaced it with Utah Territory has been well-explored, the subject of Utah's post-1850 boundaries and how they changed remains poorly understood.<sup>1</sup> This article examines in comprehensive but not exhaustive fashion the chain of events by which an enormous, 225,000-square-mile Utah Territory lost six regions on her western, northern, and eastern frontiers to become today's familiar, substantially more limited state of 85,000 square miles. Part of this story is a little known set of political dynamics that threatened to dismember Utah as a geo-political entity throughout much of her forty-five-year territorial period. The focus here will be on how and why this phenomenon happened, what Utah's leaders thought and did about it, and where Utah's boundary experiences fit into the context of nineteenth-century American state-making.

Not covered here is the closely-related story of how Utah's boundaries were surveyed and marked once established by Congress and of the bizarre situations that arose during the decades in which these borders remained un-surveyed. That too is a colorful subject needing attention, but one more technical and field-oriented than the very human tale of politics, prejudice, and economic motivation that follows. Left for another study, then, is an account of how Utah Territory's legislative assembly mistakenly established a county (Rio Virgin) in southeastern Nevada as well as of the longstanding northern ambiguity over whether the town of Franklin was in Utah or Idaho.<sup>2</sup>

The Utah Territory that emerged from the Compromise of 1850 was bounded by the crest of the Rockies on the east, the State of California on the west, the 42nd parallel of north latitude and Oregon

Territory on the north, and the 37th parallel and New Mexico Territory on the south. It was an entity so large that several of its initial counties were more than six hundred miles wide, or about twenty percent of the width of the United States. Utah was remote, vast, and snow-bound to an extent that word of its creation on September 9, 1850, did not reach the newly-appointed governor, Brigham Young, for more than four months. Although somewhat smaller than the 265,000 square miles Brigham Young had coveted in 1849 for the Provisional State of Deseret, the distances encompassed by Utah's initial territorial borders were daunting to an extreme – if not unsustainable. Congress was skeptical to the point of providing in the legislation that established Utah a fateful provision "... that nothing in this act contained shall be construed to inhibit the government of the United States from dividing said Territory into two or more territories, in such manner, and at such times, as Congress shall deem convenient and proper, or from attaching any portion of said Territory to any other State or Territory of the United States."<sup>3</sup>

There were no changes in Utah's external boundaries until 1861, but the subject was debated frequently before the Civil War. During the 1850s three volatile issues arose with serious negative implications for preservation of Utah's territorial integrity throughout that decade and thereafter. First came the LDS church's public announcement in August 1852 of the doctrine of plural marriage, which unleashed a tsunami of rabid anti-Mormonism spilling into the national political scene, including the 1856 anti-polygamy platform plank of the new Republican Party.<sup>4</sup> Next, and accompanying the furor over polygamy was a corrosive, decade-long deterioration in federal-Mormon relations fueled by conflicts over every possible area of interface – especially the quality and behavior of federally-appointed officers for Utah – that degenerated into the Utah War of 1857-1858.<sup>5</sup> Third, and immediately subsequent to the Utah War was the discovery of fabulous gold and silver deposits at two sites remote from organized government – Cherry Creek in western Kansas Territory and the Comstock Lode in western Utah Territory.<sup>6</sup>

These were forces and events that by the end of the 1850s had all but destroyed national political support for Utah while inflaming long-standing anti-Mormon prejudices and stimulating calls for more

local, Gentile-friendly government. With emotional perceptions of Utah Mormons and their leaders as immoral, un-American, disloyal, theocratic, and anti-mining there were repeated calls for Utah's mutilation if not obliteration.

In a sense the problem first arose during the winter of 1849-1850 with the congressional debates that subsequently evolved into the Compromise of 1850. At that time two petitions were submitted to Congress that had been stimulated by William B. Smith, younger brother of the late Joseph Smith, Jr. These petitions were so critical of the Salt Lake faction of the LDS church and its loyalty to the United States that they did serious damage to the cause of Mormon statehood and Brigham Young's geographical aspirations for governmental organization on a Deseret-like scale.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after Utah was organized in 1850 as a territory, early signs that the anti-Mormon cartographical knives were out surfaced in the west near California. They were fueled by the absence of any effective local government in Carson Valley, land hunger in California, and ambiguity over the precise location of the California-Utah border as well as by subsequent shock over the 1852 polygamy announcement. The result was non-Mormon advocacy for either annexation of western Utah by California or its organization as a separate territory. In 1852 the California legislature went so far as to enact a law establishing an entire county (Pautah) within the borders of western Utah, an extraordinary act of encroachment not repealed until 1859.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, Apostle Orson Hyde, who Brigham Young later sent to Carson Valley to organize a local county, build a Mormon colony, and monitor the California boundary issue, had also concluded that one large Utah was ungovernable. Privately Apostle Hyde considered the possibility of establishing western Utah's Ruby Valley as the locus of a new territory, a fantasy based on Hyde's assumption that such a move would result in LDS control of two substantial political entities rather than just Utah. Here was a kingdom-building vision to which the LDS leadership would return repeatedly during subsequent decades for both defensive and offensive purposes.

That Apostle Hyde's views from Carson Valley stimulated if not influenced Brigham Young's thoughts about the shifting of territorial lines and the entire congressional state-making process is apparent in Governor Young's 1855 letter to Apostle John Taylor, who was then in Manhattan supervising

the launch of a newspaper called *The Mormon*. "...In regard to dividing Utah, it would be much better to admit her in the Union first, as they did California, with her boundary, and then if she saw proper let her divide herself. There is policy in favor of a small State on the western slope of the Continent to maintain as they say, in embryo the balance of power. But sparsely inhabited Territory, like Utah, should first be admitted." Brigham Young went on to reflect "If Oregon and other Territories can be admitted, Utah certainly has an equal right for her white population probably exceeds that of any other Territory in the Union."<sup>8</sup>

In 1856 inveterate schemer-politician Isaac Roop, an Ohioan transplanted to what would become Nevada via California, organized a provisional Territory of Nataqua in northwestern Utah Territory that failed of support among even California border locals experienced in such intrigues<sup>9</sup>.

Perhaps the most dramatic, colorful and obscure of the multiple pre-Civil War threats to Utah's territorial integrity was the one spawned by the 1853-1854 congressional debates over what became the Kansas-Nebraska Act.<sup>10</sup> Embedded in these debates was a proposal to move Utah's eastern boundary substantially westward from the crest of the Rockies to the rim of the Great Basin – a move that would have reduced Utah's area by an estimated one-third.

The impetus in Congress for this change was the cumulative impact of several of the great emotional controversies involving Utah during its early territorial period: the uproar over polygamy, the flight of the so-called "runaway officials," and corrosive accusations of Mormon complicity in the 1853 Gunnison massacre. Surprisingly, perhaps the most influential factor fueling the move to alter Utah's eastern frontier during the Kansas-Nebraska debates was the persistent lobbying efforts in Washington of a single, rough-hewn illiterate – national icon Jim Bridger, the country's most famous frontiersman other than Kit Carson. Bridger had been run out of Utah's Black's Fork district in 1853 by a large Mormon posse seeking to serve arrest warrants running to the sale of alcohol and munitions to Indians during Utah's Walker War.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. John M. Bernhisel, Utah's long-suffering but highly effective congressional delegate, first raised the alarm over Jim Bridger's anti-Mormon assertions and the related congressional consideration

of a potential shift in Utah's eastern frontier through a February 13, 1854, letter to Brigham Young:

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> ultimo [January] the same Committee [chaired by Senator Stephen A. Douglas] reported another bill, dividing Nebraska into two Territories, making the fortieth parallel of north latitude the boundary between them, and to my utter amazement, the eastern rim of the Great Basin the western boundary of these Territories, thus including within the limits about one third of the Territory of Utah. ... You will doubtless be greatly surprised at this sad and startling intelligence, if you can yet be surprised at anything that occurs in these last days.

The bill is now under consideration in the Senate, and will doubtless pass that body by a decided majority. What its fate will be in the House, God only knows. I am making every exertion to prevent our boundaries from being disturbed....

James Bridger arrived in Washington January 5<sup>th</sup> and is here still, telling marvelous stories about his being driven from his home in the mountains ... These gross exaggerations and misrepresentations are the cause of the attempt to curtail our boundaries, so that he will be without [outside] the jurisdiction of Utah.<sup>12</sup>

On March 11, 1854, an obviously relieved Delegate Bernhisel reported to Governor Young that the Kansas-Nebraska Act was being passed without impact on Utah's borders.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, when Bernhisel's first alarming report reached Brigham Young, he promptly swung into action. In an April 29, 1854, letter to Senator Douglas, a long-standing Illinois ally of the Mormons and chairman of the senate committee on the territories, the governor took the offensive with an attack on Jim Bridger's character in classic Brigham Young style – a blunt frontal assault bolstered with a clutch of reputation damaging affidavits, an interesting tactic for a leader who so detested legalisms. Enveloping this mailed fist was a velvet glove designed for Senator Douglas. Nonetheless, it was in this letter that Brigham Young gently unveiled for Douglas the first hint of a Mormon threat that was to be used repeatedly throughout the 1860s and 1870s in dealing with thrusts for territorial dismemberment – the prospect of spreading Mormon political influence in the wake of any border change. Because it provides a glimpse into Brigham Young's passion on this subject at this point in Utah's history as well as the tactics to be used in later decades, this is a letter worth studying:

... It is also rumored that one James Bridger, from Black's Fork of Green River, has become the oracle to Congress in all matters pertaining to Utah, not only civil & political, but even historical & geographical....

From all I can as yet learn concerning the boundaries of the contemplated new Territories, (Nebraska & Kansas) I find that the Eastern boundary of Utah is moved from its [originally established] Organic line on the Summit of the Rocky Mountains to the Eastern rim of what is called the Great Basin. This may be a very wise, crafty, & politic, & just ~~movement~~ alteration of boundary, but I must candidly say that I do not so consider it, for numerous reasons which I presume you do, or should, know, hence I will waive stating them ...

In all frankness, friend Douglass [sic], I shall feel exceedingly obliged by the organization of the two proposed Territories, & with their proposed boundaries, for in Nebraska our population is even now the majority, & we had contemplated making several settlements there in a short time, & you see that we stand every chance for having *two* Territories in lieu of *one*.<sup>14</sup>

Having thus assailed Jim Bridger's reputation and gently given Senator Douglas pause to think about his own political behavior, Brigham Young turned on the same day to the task of sharing his views with Delegate Bernhisel in a bruising letter that quickly deteriorated into a rant against Utah's mountaineers and Washington's politicians. Here, in a private letter to his cautious territorial delegate, one sees Brigham Young with the bark on – a governor whose rhetoric and passion a respectful Bernhisel spent years trying to manage:

Dear Brother,

Yours of Feb'y 13<sup>th</sup> arrived on the 13<sup>th</sup> inst, ~~giving the first~~ filled with quite a variety of very interesting news. Concerning the last proposed western boundary for the Nebraska & Kansas, viz: the eastern rim of the Great Basin, it is very [illegible] that the nature of the country is such that ~~the~~ its inhabitants would be far better accommodated in their governmental affairs ~~to have~~ by leaving the middle boundary line on the summit of the Rocky Mountains as heretofore, and if one James Bridger must be the only inhabitant worthy of belief & patronage by Congress, that boundary would still be the best, & then organize ~~a new~~ still another Territory designed directly for the benefit of the illustrious James Bridger, & as a reward for his highly patriotic services & speeches,... it would pass the bounds of the most visionary dreams of men of sense to imagine that a man of Bridger's appearance, ignorance, & folly, (to use no more plain, & strictly correct terms) could have any influence with the professed wise men of our nation, & if he has, it only goes to prove ~~that~~ how many ~~evil~~ characters are at Washington who prefer *lies* to the *truth*, & what will you do about it? ... Please say to all who advocate such policy, "~~Kiss my ass, damn you~~", that we cannot well prevent fools from exhibiting their folly & keep your pet Bridger there, if you wish to preserve him, for if the legal officers [of Utah] get hold of him, & just laws of ~~their~~ your own making are enforced he may be strung up between the heavens & the earth.<sup>15</sup>

In the wake of such controversies and with a still small but rapidly growing population, Utah's 1852 attempt to re-petition Congress for the establishment of a State of Deseret failed. When petitions for statehood were again forwarded to Washington during the summer of 1856, Senator Douglas advised against sending them to Congress on grounds that, in the midst of the national political conventions, submission alone would trigger fatal support for a move afoot to dismember Utah by repealing her organic act and distributing her territory to neighboring political entities.<sup>16</sup>

With year-end 1856 and what in retrospect was the approach of the Utah War, pressures to realign Utah's borders intensified, with perhaps the most high profile such advocacy coming from Representative Justin S. Morrill of Vermont, the tenacious Republican legislator whose name would be attached five years later to the first federal anti-polygamy legislation. On February 23, 1857, in the closing days of the Pierce administration, Morrill crafted a long speech on Mormon affairs which ranged through an analysis of Utah's unusual legal system, the character of Brigham Young's theocracy, and the evils of polygamy as Morrill saw them. Under the heading "What Is To Be Done?" Morrill offered five congressional remedies, two of which had implications for Utah's territorial integrity: "We may circumscribe the boundaries of the Territory, and give the inhabitants much narrower limits ... We may cut up the Territory, and annex it to the various adjoining Territories." Although the timing of Morrill's speech was such that it stimulated no immediate congressional action, its text received national attention. Morrill's address served as a catalyst during the subsequent Buchanan and Lincoln administrations for those seeking a surgical metaphor for solution of the Mormon problem.<sup>17</sup>

During the Utah War itself, a conflict in which Jim Bridger served as the army's chief guide, Brigham Young in effect created a partial political vacuum on Utah's western and eastern flanks with the defensive evacuation of the Mormon colonies in San Bernardino, Las Vegas, Carson Valley, Fort Bridger, and Fort Supply.<sup>18</sup> Into some of these areas flowed substantial Gentile populations, especially with the post-war mineral strikes at Cherry Creek (Denver) and the Comstock Lode (Virginia City).

Among the earliest casualties of the Utah War was the theretofore largely positive relationship between the LDS church and Senator Douglas. The cause of this rupture was a speech given by

Douglas in Springfield, Illinois on June 12, 1857, two weeks after the launch of the Utah Expedition and soon after his return from Washington. It was a strange speech – delivered in impromptu fashion at the invitation of a sitting grand jury – in which Douglas ranged through three of the most volatile subjects of the day: the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision, “bleeding” Kansas, and Utah affairs. When it came to Mormon matters, Douglas may have been stimulated by bitter inputs from recently-resigned Utah Associate Justice Willis W. Drummond as well as by the sting of Republican efforts to portray Douglas’s pet doctrine of Popular Sovereignty (local choice) as a de facto defense of polygamy in the territories. After reciting the then-current litany of accusations against Utah’s Mormons – principally disloyalty and un-American backgrounds and tendencies – Senator Douglas advocated the repeal of Utah’s organic act and therefore her territorial obliteration. For the remedy, Douglas used graphic surgical imagery: “When the authentic evidence shall arrive, if it shall establish the facts which are believed to exist, it will become the duty of Congress to apply the knife and cut out this loathsome disgusting ulcer. [Applause.] No temporizing policy – no half-way measure will then answer.” With this political betrayal and provocative language, Douglas was immediately assigned to a place in the LDS pantheon of Utah War villains second only to Drummond’s.<sup>19</sup>

Even before it was clear how the Utah War was to be resolved, the pressures for dismemberment intensified. On October 21, 1857, Apostle John Taylor wrote to the beleaguered U.S. Army on Ham’s Fork: “You may be aware that measures were also set on foot and bills prepared to divide up Utah among the Territories of Nebraska, Kansas, Oregon and New Mexico, (giving a slice to California) for the purpose of bringing us into collision with the people of these Territories ...” Two months later a Kansas newspaper devoted its Christmas day editorial to speculation about a new territory of “Columbus” to be carved from Utah’s western flank. On January 8, 1858 – as part of his last official act – California’s outgoing governor, J. Neely Johnson, called for the organization of a new territory to encompass western Utah’s Carson Valley.<sup>20</sup> Ten days later Delegate Bernhisel reported to Brigham Young from Congress that a “... resolution to inquire into the expediency of repealing the territorial act of Utah, and attaching the Territory to other territories or adjoin[ing] States are still before the Committee [on Territories].”<sup>21</sup>



Wading into the fry of proposed border changes during the Utah War was another bete noir of Utah's early territorial period, Judge Perry E. Brochchus, the catalyst and most prominent of the principals during the 1851-52 imbroglio of the so-called "runaway officials." Brochchus wrote to President Buchanan to advise him on how to conclude the military aspects of the campaign and then wrote to U.S. Representative William Smith of Virginia in florid terms to advocate support for the movement to form a Nevada Territory from Utah's western region: "...from my knowledge of the facilities which they [Mormons] have for the prosecution of their nefarious purposes toward the feeble, defenceless [sic], and unprotected settlements in the Nevada country, I feel no hesitation in saying that justice and humanity demand the immediate organization of a government over that region..."

Notwithstanding these threats, border change did not strike Utah for several more years, partially because of Bernhisel's effectiveness but largely due to the complexity of competing, simultaneous pressures in Congress for organization or re-organization of a substantial number of other territories in the face of the slavery issue. In 1859, though, Horace Greeley, the influential publisher-editor of the *New York Tribune*, interviewed Brigham Young in Great Salt Lake City and offered his readers the following advice with respect to Utah's borders:

Let the Mormons have the territory to themselves – it is worth very little to others, but reduce its area by cutting off Carson Valley on the one side, and making a Rocky Mountain territory on the other side, and then let them go on their way rejoicing. I believe this is not only by far the cheapest but the safest and best mode of dealing with the [Mormon] difficulties already developed and daily developing here.<sup>22</sup>

In late 1859 William Henry Hooper went to Washington as Dr. Bernhisel's successor with at least two instructions bearing on Utah's territorial integrity. First, given Brigham Young's growing impatience with cautionary advice and his inclination to let chips fall where they might, the new congressional delegate was instructed to resurrect and submit the 1856 statehood petition with boundaries for Deseret coinciding with those of Utah Territory. Secondly, Delegate Hooper was provided a sort of disaster plan to meet the contingency by which Congress might execute threats to disorganize Utah and distribute her

territory to her neighbors. In such an event Utah would refuse to recognize the new arrangement, would immediately organize herself into a provisional state, and would petition Congress for statehood.

Whether or not the strategizing associated with such a scenario provided for a next move if Congress were to refuse statehood under such dramatic circumstances is unclear, but there are hints that the response in Utah would be extraordinary.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout 1860 Delegate Hooper grappled with political rumors, feints and thrusts bearing on the possible creation of a new territory – “Nevada” – to be carved out of Utah’s western flank, and an eastern intrusion – sometimes called “Jefferson” and occasionally “Idaho” – spawned by the gold strikes near what is now Denver. Accompanying this political maneuvering – and perhaps even aggravating it – were closely related, unsuccessful congressional efforts to secure passage of the first federal anti-polygamy legislation.

The messages between Brigham Young and Delegate Hooper during 1860 provide insight into what threats to Utah’s territorial integrity were afoot and which were acceptable to the LDS leadership and why. They also provide examples of President Young’s concern for Hooper’s health and peace of mind, as when the prophet wrote: “I don’t expect Congress to do much to benefit Utah if they know it, and can help it ... all I wish to say further to you at present is to remember the 13th commandment: ‘Fret not thy gizzard because of sinners.’”<sup>24</sup> With respect to threats, on March 8, 1860, President Young wrote:

In action upon Territories, if any, so far as our lives are concerned I know of no objection to Jefferson’s extending west to 107°, but Nevada should certainly be content to stop at 115°, for there is nothing that she can want or use between 115° and 113°; still if any prevailing influence insists upon a larger slice of desert for Nevada, there would probably be no serious objection to compromising upon 114°. I have never heard of any opposition in Utah to the organization of Nevada, so [long as] her eastern boundary is not extended too far from her settlements and settleable regions, which she ought to have too much good judgement to ask for.<sup>25</sup>

On April 8, 1860, Hooper grew alarmed and reported to Brigham Young his confrontation with the house committee on the territories in which Hooper made clear that Utah would not submit to total dismemberment, a position that he had stated directly to President Buchanan’s sympathetic attorney

general, Jeremiah S. Black.<sup>26</sup>

Brigham Young's reaction during the spring of 1860 to Congress's failure to create Nevada and Jefferson at Utah's expense was to advise a distraught Hooper twice to "... take courage and be of good cheer, as one knowing that our God controls the results of the acts of the children of men ... That [divine] control was signally manifested in the late acts of the House in relation to Utah."<sup>27</sup>

But with the withdrawal of many of the southern states from Congress during the secession winter of 1860-1861, the way was open during the closing days of the Buchanan administration to complete the formation of three new western territories. Sensing what was coming for Utah, the Salt Lake *Mountaineer* – a Mormon newspaper – ran an editorial headed "Nevada" on December 8, 1860. It was a remarkable piece signaling acceptance of a truncated western frontier but one that did so with unmistakable poor grace:

The [Virginia City newspaper] is as boisterous as ever in its call for a separate territorial organization ...

Fully, then, do we endorse the sentiments of our neighbors. Let there be a division, palpable and understood. Beyond the desert our friends do not admire our ways. We have no objections. They seek another government. We are willing. They are fond of litigation. We proffer no objections. If they think that they can travel alone, we dare undertake the toilsome task by ourselves.

Since the first organization of the Territory, Carson [Valley] has been a most unremunerating burthen upon Utah. What is she now? A worthless, unaccountable scab, which cannot find a place in any class of an honest vocabulary. So let her remain, dried up, buried and forgotten.<sup>28</sup>

During his last unhappy week in office, President Buchanan signed bills establishing Nevada, Colorado, and Dakota territories. Nevada – the heart of the current state – was created by breaking off a very large (63,214 square miles) section of Utah Territory west of the 116th meridian.<sup>29</sup> Dakota was formed from Washington and Nebraska territories, but, as discussed below, her creation triggered a partial expansion in Nebraska's boundaries that ran to Utah's disadvantage in her northeast corner.

Colorado was formed largely at the expense of Kansas, Nebraska, and New Mexico, although her western region was created and its boundary defined by removing from Utah a significant area lying between the summit of the Rockies – the original eastern line for both unrecognized Deseret and established Utah – and the 109th meridian to the west.

Precisely why Colorado's western boundary was carved out of Utah's eastern flank and established at the 109th meridian of western longitude is not well understood, especially because it was a region of the Pacific slope so isolated and barren that settlers did not penetrate it in any substantial way until the 1880s.<sup>30</sup> In their December 1859 petition to Congress, the Jeffersonians had pleaded, without any explanation or rationale, for a western boundary to be established at the 110th meridian.<sup>31</sup> This was a proposed line considerably more ambitious and west of what Congress subsequently gave Colorado in 1861. What was probably at work in the proposals of the Jeffersonians and Coloradans was the allure of geometric simplicity – a rectangular-shaped territory – coupled with a desire to annex as much as possible of a potentially ore-bearing part of Utah.<sup>32</sup> Realizing by then that their western flanks were to be lost to Colorado in any event, there was no reason for the territorial delegates of Nebraska and Kansas to plead Utah's case in Congress, and they did not.

If the specific logic behind creation of Colorado's western frontier is little discussed, there is even less understanding of the chain of events affecting Utah's northeast corner and loss of its distinctive "notch." The nearly universal assumption today is that this border oddity was created in its entirety in 1868 with the establishment of Wyoming Territory. Not so; the notch was created in two steps, with the first (easternmost) half lost by Utah in March 1861 through the provisions of the Dakota legislation which altered Nebraska Territory by giving it 10,740 square miles of what had been part of Utah.<sup>33</sup> This now obscure change extended Nebraska's pronounced panhandle shape, presumably to continue her influence over a corridor encompassing the crucial emigration trails as far west as the Green River district. There are signs that both Delegate Hooper and President Young were caught off-guard by this development.<sup>34</sup> Upon recognizing the confusion that such a low profile change caused with respect to the political governance for the Mormons' Green River ferries and the main emigration route, Brigham Young

commented that he considered it to be a “blunder” that needed rectifying.<sup>35</sup>

How did LDS leaders feel about the creation of Nevada and Colorado? With respect to Nevada, Delegate Hooper later told the House that his attitude was “... so far from opposing the measure, I acquiesced in it.”<sup>36</sup> It is more difficult to determine Brigham Young’s true feelings, but the comments that he left seem amazingly nonchalant in comparison to those during the earlier Kansas-Nebraska threat. Perhaps this was a case of presidential mellowing, fatalism, or whistling past the graveyard. And so on April 2, 1861, President Young wrote two letters to Mormon agents in San Francisco. To Elder Dwight Eveleth he confided: “We are much pleased that Colorado and Nevada are organized with meridians 109 and 116 for boundaries between us, as this arrangement precludes the howlings, growlings, and other annoyances from our western neighbors. If they cannot now regulate affairs to suit them, which of course they can not, they have no one to blame but themselves.”<sup>37</sup>

To the flamboyant, soon-notorious Walter Murray Gibson, President Young wrote a similar letter. But for Elder Gibson he added the unprophetic thought that the boundary adjustment “... leaves our Territory in a very convenient shape, and one which it will bother our enemies to readily find a pretext for changing again.”<sup>38</sup> He remained silent on the far smaller loss to Nebraska in the northeast corner which – buried as it was in Dakota legislation – may not yet have been apparent in Great Salt Lake City. Also undiscussed was an obscure, remarkable provision of Nevada’s territorial constitution which explicitly anticipated and facilitated the subsequent movement of her eastern frontier through encroachments into western Utah.<sup>39</sup>

Notwithstanding President Young’s lightheartedness in April 1861, he continued to brood over Senator Douglas’s earlier betrayal. A month after corresponding with Elders Eveleth and Gibson, Brigham Young wrote a caustic, mocking letter to a gravely ill Douglas reminding him of his 1857 Springfield speech as well as his role in the disruption of the Union then so violently in progress. With Douglas’s failed 1860 presidential bid and Joseph Smith’s apocalyptic 1843 prophecy about Douglas’s political fate in mind, President Young closed: “Do you not begin to realize that the prediction of the Prophet Joseph Smith, personally delivered to you, has been and is being literally fulfilled upon your

head? Why have you barked with the dogs, except to prove that you were a dog with them?" The velvet glove was off. Within a month – even before receiving this letter – Stephen A. Douglas lay dead in Chicago, with Fort Sumter in Confederate hands.<sup>40</sup>

Upon assuming the presidency, Abraham Lincoln, Senator Douglas's archrival, explained his Mormon policy by commenting that if Brigham Young "... will let me alone, I will let him alone."<sup>41</sup> But 1862 brought a further deterioration in federal-Mormon relations, including a new regiment of federal troops to garrison Utah and the passage of the Morrill Act, the first of a series of federal laws intended to eradicate plural marriage.<sup>42</sup> Within this context, a fourth attempt at statehood for Deseret failed during 1862, and the new Nevada Territory – fresh from an unsuccessful border conflict with California – succeeded in further encroaching on Utah.<sup>43</sup> This time congress moved the Nevada-Utah boundary east one additional degree of longitude from the 116th to the 115th meridian. Having resumed his old role as territorial delegate, Dr. Bernhisel reported his perceptions as to the motivations behind this 18,325-square-mile change – gold in the Humboldt Mountains – as well as his inability to get changes to repair the "notch" problem created in 1861.<sup>44</sup>

If ultimately Delegate Bernhisel was unable to remedy Utah's northeast border problem, it was not for his lack of tenacity. After months of lobbying Nebraska's congressional delegate and territorial secretary, Bernhisel obtained their support for a change that would retain the 42nd parallel as the northern boundary but move Utah's northeastern frontier eastward one degree of longitude from the 110th to the 109th meridian. This was not Utah's original border (the crest of the Rockies, even further east) but it was at least a line consistent with the common boundary with Colorado Territory that had been created by congress in 1861. He then set out to influence the congressional committees with jurisdiction. But there Bernhisel encountered implacable forces ranging from fundamental hostility to Utah to a fondness for geometric simplicity, a traditional factor often at work in the American state-making process. With respect to the latter, one congressman deflected Bernhisel's plea for border rationalization in 1862 with the revealing comment that "... it would disfigure Nebraska just as much as it would improve the appearance of Utah."<sup>45</sup> Here was a depth of analysis worthy of geographer Albert L. Fisher's

comment 117 years later: “It is said that geometric boundaries are used when there is ignorance of the land or the people or both. This must have been true for Utah....”<sup>46</sup>

Although there were continual attempts at border realignment – especially by Nevada – no further changes in Utah’s external borders occurred during the Civil War, but federal-Mormon relations continued to fester. With Reconstruction’s punitive atmosphere, the attitude in Congress was that the war had eradicated one of the twin relics of barbarism – slavery – and the time had come to deal with the nation’s second peculiar institution, polygamy.<sup>47</sup>

Within a year after Lincoln’s death, Nevada – a state since 1864 – sought to encompass within her frontiers additional mineral deposits. Most coveted were the anticipated silver lodes of the Pahranaagat Mining District, which was already in southeastern Nevada but – absent a border survey – was believed by some to be in Mormon Utah. In 1866 Nevada succeeded in getting congress to move her boundary another degree of longitude east to the 114th meridian – involving 18,325 square miles – where the Utah-Nevada border remains today.<sup>48</sup> At the fore-front of this change and virtually every subsequent attempt during the 1860s either to reduce Utah’s borders or to obliterate her was Representative James M. Ashley of Toledo, Ohio, chairman of the house committee on the territories and a hard-line Republican since the 1856 creation of the party’s anti-polygamy platform plank. During his 1865 fact-finding trip to Salt Lake City, Representative Ashley caused a minor and long-forgotten stir by unsuccessfully urging one of the town aldermen to provide him with female companionship.<sup>49</sup> Whether this unverified incident affected Ashley’s subsequent appetite for legislation running to Utah’s disadvantage is difficult to determine, although George A. Smith clearly believed that it did. Also an imponderable is the accuracy of Ashley’s unsubstantiated comment that during the same visit “President Young told me he had no objection whatever to this proposed dismemberment of the territory of Utah. There are but few, if any, of his people living upon the Territory proposed to be transferred [to Nevada].”<sup>50</sup>

The maneuvering in Congress leading to the 1866 border shift was often bare-knuckled and took a terrible toll on the health of William H. Hooper, who had again succeeded Dr. Bernhisel as Utah’s congressional delegate. Speaking in opposition to the enabling legislation in the House, Delegate

Hooper focused on the unilateral, neo-colonial, non-consultative character of the proposal, noting that “On the simple action of a committee thousands of square miles are taken from one Territory and attached to another without ... consulting the people who are to be transferred [thereby] ... reducing these people ... to the condition of serfs.” In the floor debates a Nevada congressman put the case baldly: “The reason why we want this territory for Nevada is that our people from Nevada have discovered mines in that degree of latitude, and we are occupying the country now. ... The people of Nevada are a mining people, while the people of Utah are an agricultural people ... the Mormons have always been averse to mining ... our people who discover and work mines there do not wish to be under the control of the government of Utah. ...” W. Paul Reeve concludes that “... the 1866 boundary shift, in essence, privileged a state over two territories, mining over agriculture, and money, or more precisely the illusion of money, over the principal of popular consent.”<sup>51</sup>

The year 1867 brought continued pressure on Utah’s territorial integrity with proposals in Nevada’s state legislature to annex the entirety of what remained of Utah. There were also thrusts in Washington to distribute all but the Salt Lake Valley to Utah’s neighbors. Utah reacted editorially with a form of fey bemusement, singling out debt-burdened, economically floundering Nevada for the brunt of its attention and lampoonery. Here, as had Brigham Young earlier, T.B.H. Stenhouse’s *Salt Lake Telegraph* lit an editorial backfire by asking if any of Utah’s neighbors really wanted to upset their internal political balances by receiving into their midst a substantial Mormon voting bloc. The *Telegraph* brought home its point with a cunning editorial titled “Plenty of Room,” which evoked a vision of hundreds of thousands of English Mormons emigrating to the West, including to Utah’s neighbors.<sup>52</sup> This line of argument – a bit like the Br’er Rabbit/briar patch stratagem of *The Uncle Remus Stories* – was highly effective in blunting the most far-ranging moves contemplated for Utah.

Nonetheless, in 1868 Congress reacted to the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad west of Cheyenne and the discovery of gold near South Pass by organizing a rectangular Wyoming Territory carved out of the enormity of Dakota Territory. In the process, Wyoming took from Dakota (which had acquired it from Idaho Territory) the relatively small rectangular area bounded by the 110th meridian and



41st parallel that Nebraska had first taken from northeast Utah Territory in 1861 and expanded this “notch” by moving the border another degree of longitude to the west. Accordingly, the Wyoming-Utah border was established at the 111th meridian, where it remains today.

With the creation of a rectangular Wyoming in 1868 and the reaffirmation and extension of Utah’s loss of this distinctive “notch,” Utah’s external borders received what were to be their final adjustment. With hindsight, one might say that both Jim Bridger and Horace Greeley had their ways.

Notwithstanding this appearance of stability, beaten back during the twenty-eight years between the 1868 establishment of Wyoming and 1896 statehood for Utah were an astonishing array of proposals to adjust Utah’s borders too numerous to be catalogued here. Among others, there was a spectacular, complex but unsuccessful 1869 Ashley-led thrust to dismember Utah in stages, with the motivation this time a naked attempt to destroy Mormon political power (“to blot out the Territory”) rather than concern over control of prospective silver mines. The result would have been a map that Delegate Hooper described as a “legislative earthquake.” Apostle George A. Smith fumed over the impact on western Utah: “... for a population of twenty-five thousand [Utahns] to be transferred to Nevada like pigs shut in a pen and then gratuitously made heirs to a share of Nevada’s debts with a full share of her poll taxes ... seems a severe penalty ... We feel no apprehension that Congress could be mad enough to pass such a Bill and would feel surprised that the Committee on Territories could disgrace itself by producing such an unreasonable measure merely to gratify a choleric spleen.”<sup>53</sup>

In addition to this 1869 thrust, there were also: Nevada’s subsequent attempts to encroach even further east; President Grant’s surprising 1872 efforts to re-allocate a portion of underpopulated, economically failing Wyoming Territory to Utah; and the final unsuccessful Mormon effort in 1872 to create a State of Deseret encompassing not only Utah Territory but suggested portions of both Idaho and Arizona territories.<sup>54</sup>

Even in what proved to be the last year of his life, seventy-four-year-old Brigham Young was called upon to react to startling potential shifts in Utah’s boundaries, including multiple proposals that ranged in character between total dismemberment to a scheme that added new territory to Utah while

removing other areas. On March 6, 1876, Territorial Delegate and LDS Apostle George Q. Cannon wrote to President Young from Washington to describe those options, all of which ultimately failed. Cannon's comments here are revealing for multiple reasons: they were addressed not to Utah's legal governor but to a man who nonetheless still very much led the territory's people; and they reflect the extent to which the fires of indignation within Cannon – as well as Brigham Young – had been tempered by a sense of practical accommodation which focused more on regionalism and the logic of Mormon settlement patterns than on the allure of territorial size or the symmetry of geometric boundaries:

Enclosed I send you a Map, a copy of which you will find in the Report of the Indian Commissioner. I have marked it with ink to show you a proposition which Mr. Foot of Ill., who was out at Utah last Summer, thinks of making. His idea is to introduce a Bill changing the boundaries of the Territories and make them large enough to be admitted as States. Arizona will be united to New Mexico, a part of Wyoming to Colorado, a part to Utah and a part to Montana. To Utah there will be also a part of Idaho attached, and a part also to Oregon and another part to Washington. Dakotah will be divided between Montana and Minnesota. You can see by the map what the changes will be. He says that some have thought that Nevada might be strengthened by dividing Utah down the centre of the Mountains and attaching her western part to Nevada and her eastern to Colorado. I told him that this would be like splitting a man up his backbone. We were widely separated from both our neighbors on the east and west. He said he was not in favor of the proposition himself, but how did I like his boundaries. I told him frankly that if a Bill with the boundaries marked on the map could be carried, I should be in favor of it ... Look at the Map and please let me know your views. We are rapidly reaching such a growth of population that a threat to divide us does not have much terror. We should prove a power in any family upon which they may seek to engraft us, and I think that the feeling is to confine us to ourselves as much as possible and let the problem be fought out in Utah....<sup>55</sup>

And so the legislative gnawing at Utah's flanks continued throughout the 1870s and occasionally beyond.

Ironically, once Utah became a state in 1896, she continued, somewhat Nevada-like, to try to annex the Arizona Strip – that portion of Arizona Territory lying between the 37th parallel and the Colorado River to the south.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps after decades of experiencing shrinkage in her borders, Utah considered turnabout – and a renewed effort at expansion – to be fair play.

In summary, why did Utah lose these six tranches of territory during 1861-1868? Tempting as it

is to assume that anti-Mormon prejudice was the dominant reason, the story of Utah's border shifts is more complex than that factor alone. Certainly substantial "anti" forces were powerfully afoot throughout the period under discussion. But their principal impact was to undercut the arguments of Utah's would-be defenders. Utah's major handicaps were her sheer, unsustainable size, hostility to mining, and the Mormons' inability to obtain statehood in 1850 as California had done. Had effective county governments for mining districts been created and had Utah been a state during this period, territorial amputations would have been far more difficult, if not impossible to accomplish, as the cases of enormous but undivided Texas and California demonstrate.<sup>57</sup>

What did Utahns think of these changes? From LDS leaders there was a surprising range of reactions – including acquiescence and acceptance – depending upon the time, circumstances, and leader involved. After a decade of battling, his loss of the governorship, and a painful realization that much of what was western Utah could not sustain significant population levels, Brigham Young became surprisingly philosophical as long as the populous north/south corridor through the Salt Lake Valley and beyond was protected for Utah.<sup>58</sup> His carpetbagger-successors as governors were indifferent to Utah's fate territorially at a time when her congressional delegates and Apostle George A. Smith were deeply troubled by Congress's cavalier if not rapacious treatment of Utah's borders.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly Brigham Young saw the ultimate defense for Utah's borders – and the rest of her destiny – as lying with divine providence. The major fall-back strategy was the attainment of statehood, although with hindsight that strategy was hopelessly protracted by the need to resolve the polygamy furor. For the most part, Mormon newspaper defenses of the 1860s and thereafter dealt with potential border shifts with a deft, even light editorial tone. Interestingly, throughout these border wars Mormon leadership focused on the bete noire of Nevada with little commentary about Utah's eastern flank once the Kansas-Nebraska crisis passed in 1854. Because of its strategic location vis-a-vis emigration routes, concern over the tranche taken out of Utah's northeast corner in 1861 was an exception to this apparent lack of anxiety, although the importance of even that issue waned once it became clear that a transcontinental railroad would replace travel by the overland trail.

Once President Young resumed his interest in colonizing after the Utah War, he seemed to focus more on establishing Mormon settlements than in worrying about which political entity nominally governed them. Glen M. Leonard makes this point eloquently in noting that “In the long-range Latter-day Saint historical view, the Utah-Mormon boundary didn’t much matter [anymore] ... Their religious kingdom, like Daniel’s stone, rolled forth from the mountain-top territory in the American West. The Mormon ecclesiastical sphere became an overlay on other political, social, and cultural empires.” It is revealing that in 1863 when Mormon leaders asked Brigham Young to clarify whether the Bear Lake Valley settlement of Franklin was on the Utah or Idaho side of the unsurveyed 42nd parallel, President Young responded: “I don’t know, neither do I care ... We calculate to be the kings of these mountains. Now let us go ahead and occupy them.”<sup>60</sup> That a mass LDS exodus from Utah was periodically considered in the late 1850s and thereafter must also have had some unknown but perhaps relaxing impact on Mormon attitudes about fixed boundary lines.<sup>61</sup>

Was the massive realignment of Utah’s borders unique or unusual in the American and Western experience? In many, but not all, respects it was not. For example, consider Massachusetts’ loss of Maine, New York’s of Vermont, the original Indiana Territory’s loss of Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, Ohio’s surrender of her claims to what became Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, and huge losses of area by the original territories of Oregon, Idaho, Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, and New Mexico. If Utah Territory lost area three times to Nevada in 1861, 1862 and 1866, so too did an even younger Arizona Territory in 1867. If Utah lost part of its eastern region to Colorado, so too did New Mexico, which also lost Arizona in 1863. If Wyoming took part of Utah in 1868, it was also created in part from Dakota and from Idaho Territory, which, as Leonard J. Arrington has pointed out, was at one time larger than Texas but smaller than Alaska.<sup>62</sup>

In a sense, what Congress did to Utah’s external boundaries, Utah inflicted on herself through changes to her own county lines approximately ninety times during the territorial period. By the same token, the portions of four Utah counties that Colorado acquired in 1861 were balkanized into all or part of more than twenty Colorado counties by 1889.<sup>63</sup>

Even Congress's rejection of the name Deseret and selection of Utah in its place was not unusual. It was a legislative arbitrariness and insensitivity to the West that denied Nevada the name of Washoe, substituted Colorado for Jefferson or Idaho, and two years later selected Idaho, a name invented for yet another territory, under the misapprehension that the name had either an Indian or mineral association. It was with such behavior that a Pennsylvania-born congressman inflicted the name of a valley in his native state on a Wyoming-in-formation.<sup>64</sup>

What was truly unique about the transformation of Utah's borders was not the fact that they changed – as originally drawn they were unsustainable – but rather that the changes were accompanied by a decades-long call for Utah's very obliteration as a geopolitical entity. No other American territory or state shared this Carthaginian threat; not even the post-war fate of the eleven blood-soaked states of the Confederacy was considered so punitively. With the sole exception of Virginia's loss of her western counties during the Civil War, none of the Confederate states was punished with territorial losses.<sup>65</sup> As the nineteenth century wore on, these draconian thrusts for Utah's territorial dismemberment were mirrored in congressional action to disincorporate the LDS church and abolish Utah's territorial militia, the Nauvoo Legion.

The phenomenon of Utah's shifting boundaries was in many respects a normal part of the American frontier experience, given Congress's continuing penchant for creating in arbitrary fashion enormous, unsustainable territorial entities that later required rationalization. Glen M. Leonard argues that when Congress created Utah and New Mexico territories in 1850, it fully intended to subdivide them at a later date. Such had been the American state-making process since the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, with large, sparsely populated territories serving as administrative way-stations on the path to the subsequent establishment of more populous, smaller, and presumably more stable state governments.<sup>66</sup> At the height of the Utah War, the editor of the *Missouri Republican* described this process well while identifying its pitfalls: "The repeal of the organic law of Utah has been proposed. A question of such gravity should be well considered. Vested rights are sacred things; but Congress can dismember Utah at once without injustice. The area is abundantly large for three territories, and one might be cut off from

each flank without injury to Utah. Our Territories are all too large for the proper execution of the laws and protection of the stationary and transitory inhabitants; and it is certainly 'penny wisdom and pound foolishness' not to make them of the proper size at the outset."<sup>67</sup>

But in Utah's case, irrespective of the accountabilities involved, it was a tableau played out against the background of constant, decades-long pressure of the most intense, punitive character aggravated by the indifference during the crucial 1860s of a procession of carpetbagger-governors. That Utah managed to retain the territory that she did was no small accomplishment requiring constant vigilance and lobbying in Washington by Delegates Bernhisel, Hooper, and Cannon as well as strategizing and even dollops of humor in Salt Lake City by Utah Territory's supreme leader. Although threats and even legislative proposals to dismember Utah totally welled up throughout her territorial period, not even an enraged, frustrated American public and its Congress would go that far. Whether this restraint was because of a failure of nerve, congressional apprehension over spreading Mormon bloc voting to adjoining territories, an ultimate sense of national decency, or divine intervention, Brigham Young consistently believed in Utah's survival as an American political entity of some shape as a matter of political reality as well as of religious destiny.

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1. The most comprehensive monograph on Deseret and the Compromise of 1850 remains Dale L. Morgan, *The State of Deseret* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), a reprint of Morgan's study which originally appeared in three 1940 issues of *Utah Historical Quarterly*. Two excellent articles on the subject are Glen M. Leonard, "Southwestern Boundaries and the Principles of Statemaking," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (January 1977): 39-53 and "The Mormon Boundary Question in the 1849-50 Statehood Debates," *Journal of Mormon History* 18 (Spring 1992): 114-36. Among those few studies shedding light on the post-1850 changes to Utah's external boundaries is James B. Allen, "The Evolution of County Boundaries in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 23 (July 1955): 261-78. See also George F. Brightman, "The Boundaries of Utah," *Economic Geography* 16 (January 1940): 87-95.

2. Any study of the process by which Utah's boundaries were periodically surveyed and marked with monuments must start with C. Albert White, *Initial Points of the Rectangular Survey System* (Westminster, Colorado: The Publishing House, 1996): 305-30. Among the most fascinating accounts of the multiple field expeditions that surveyed sections of Utah's external lines are two that focus on her mountainous eastern frontier: Lloyd M. Pierson, ed., "Rollin J. Reeves and the Boundary Between Utah and Colorado," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 66 (Spring 1998): 100-17; and Lucia McCreery, ed., "Surveying the Western Boundary of Wyoming: The Diary of William A. Richards, Summer 1874," *Annals of Wyoming: The Wyoming History Journal* 73 (Autumn 2001): 2-19.

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3. Albert L. Fisher, "Utah Boundaries: Sense or Nonsense?" *Encyclia, The Journal of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 56 (1979): 127-33. U.S. 9 Stat. 453.
4. Richard D. Poll, "The Mormon Question Enters National Politics," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 25 (April 1957): 117-31 and Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question, Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-83.
5. Richard D. Poll and William P. MacKinnon, "Causes of the Utah War Reconsidered," *Journal of Mormon History* 20 (Fall 1994): 16-44; William P. MacKinnon, "125 Years of Conspiracy Theories: Origins of the Utah Expedition of 1857-58," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 52 (Summer 1984): 212-30; and Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850-1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).
6. The literature about the Comstock Lode is voluminous. The latest study of the strike at Cherry Creek is Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).
7. William B. Smith's activities are described in Morgan, *The State of Deseret*, 72-3; the petitions of December 31, 1849 and March 14, 1850 with which Smith was involved are in the National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 48 (Records of the Department of the Interior) and RG 46 (Records of the U.S. Senate), respectively.
8. Owen C. Coy, *California County Boundaries* (Berkeley: California Historical Survey Commission, 1923), 9. For a description of the cultural and political forces at work in western Utah and neighboring California during the early 1850s, see Juanita L. Brooks, "The Mormons in Carson Valley, Utah Territory," *Nevada Historical Quarterly* 8 (Spring 1965): 7-24.
- 8 Brigham Young to John Taylor, July 25, 1855, typescript in John Taylor Family Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. The author thanks Walter Jones, Head of Special Collections' Western Americana Division, for calling this letter to his attention. Brigham Young's 1855 thinking about how best for Congress to deal with the unwieldy size of large territories such as Utah—admit them as states and then permit them to sub-divide themselves if necessary—was also rooted in his surprising acceptance in 1849 of a bizarre, secret, and unsuccessful plan formulated by President Zachary Taylor by which the provisional states of California and Deseret would by-pass the territorial phase and would be organized as a single gigantic state with the understanding that in a few years it would automatically morph into separate states centered on the Pacific coast and Salt Lake Valley. See Frederick A. Culmer, "'Genera' John Wilson, Signer of the Deseret Petition," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 26 (1947): 321-48 and Edward Leo Lyman, "Larger than Texas, Proposals to Combine California and Mormon Deseret as One State," *California History* 80 (Spring 2001): 18-33 and 75.
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9. Orson Hyde to Brigham Young, October 2, 1855, Brigham Young Collection, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. The author thanks LDS-CHD for its courtesy and generosity in making the Brigham Young Collection available. For the Nataqua affair see Guy Louis Rocha, "Nevada's Emergence in the American Great Basin: Territory and State," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 38 (Winter 1995): 279n31.
10. This legislation – designed to organize politically vast sections of the Louisiana Purchase – was largely the work of Sen. Stephen A. Douglas, who saw it as an opportunity to inflict his concept of Popular Sovereignty on the American territorial process. Because it swept aside the sectional understandings about slavery in the territories embodied in the earlier Missouri Compromise of 1820, Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act unleashed forces and violence, especially in Kansas Territory, that accelerated the nation's slide toward disunion. For one of the more recent analyses of these dynamics, see Yonatan Eyal, "With His Eyes Open: Stephen A. Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Disaster of 1854," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 91 (Winter 1998): 175-217.
11. Jim Bridger's hasty departure from his trading post on Black's Fork of the Green River and his subsequent claims for compensation are well-known, but the impact of his efforts on Utah boundary matters is obscure. J. Cecil Alter, *Jim Bridger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 248-57, and Fred R. Gowans and Eugene E. Campbell, *Fort Bridger, Island in the Wilderness* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 49-76.
- 12 John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, February 13, 1854, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD.
13. Ibid., March 11, 1854.
14. Brigham Young to Stephen A. Douglas, April 29, 1854. The text of Gov. Young's retained copy – complete with indicated editorial changes (but without the Wright and Mosman affidavits) – is printed here and may be found in Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. The original letter, with accompanying affidavits, is in Stephen A. Douglas Papers, University of Chicago Library.

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15. Brigham Young to John M. Bernhisel, April 29, 1854. For the delegate's spirited but respectful defense of his stewardship in Washington, see John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, July 14, 1854, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD.
16. A description of the anti-Mormon political climate in Washington and Douglas's advice with respect to the statehood petition during the summer of 1856 appears in William I. Appleby to Brigham Young, June 30, 1856, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD, as well as in the subsequent, belated report to the Deseret constitutional convention by John Taylor and George A. Smith, *Deseret News*, January 20, 1858. The more graphic, vivid language of the latter document probably reflected the impact of the intervening events – the onset of the Utah War and Senator Douglas's betrayal.
17. "Utah Territory and Its Laws – Polygamy and Its License," Speech of Hon. J.S. Morrill of Vermont, in the House of Representatives, February 23, 1857, *Appendix to Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 3d Sess. (1856-57), 284-90. With the press of business at the close of the Pierce administration, Morrill was not permitted to deliver his address as floor remarks, although the House ordered it printed in such a way as to create this illusion. This somewhat cosmetic parliamentary arrangement seems to have galled LDS leaders as much as the content of Morrill's speech.
18. For the creation and roll-up of these colonies in 1857, see Eugene E. Campbell, "Brigham Young's Outer Cordon – A Reappraisal," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 41 (Summer 1973): 220-53. Glen M. Leonard argues that had these outposts been settled earlier, more populous, and more mining-friendly they might have contributed more effectively to the territorial viability of Utah's flanks during the late 1850s. Leonard, "The Mormon Boundary Question ...", 135-36.
19. For the text of Douglas's speech and a long, acerbic Mormon rebuttal, see *Deseret News*, September 2, 1857. So volcanic were LDS church leaders' reactions to Douglas's speech that in January 1858 the Utah legislative assembly quoted from it in the midst of a petition to the president and Congress, the language of which was so strong that it prompted a federal treason indictment for every signer of the petition. An intriguing, unknown influence on the senator may have been in an unpublished letter, W.W. Drummond to Stephen A. Douglas, May 16, 1857, found in the Stephen A. Douglas Papers, University of Chicago Library. Virtually unnoticed by Utah historians, Abraham Lincoln delivered an unexpected rebuttal to Douglas in Springfield on June 26, 1857. While not defending the Mormons or their territorial integrity, Lincoln pressed hard on Douglas's harsh remedy for the Mormon problem vis-a-vis his defense of Popular Sovereignty in the territories. The author believes that these two speeches were a little-noted prelude to, if not inspiration for, the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of the following year. Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), II, 398-410.
20. John Taylor to Capt. R.B. Marcy, October 21, 1857, *Deseret News*, January 13, 1858. Leavenworth [Kansas] *Weekly Herald*, December 25, 1857. Message of Gov. J. Neely Johnson, January 8, 1858, *Journal of the Ninth Session of the Senate of the State of California* (Sacramento: John O'Meara State Printer, 1858). See also U.S., Congress, House, *Territory of Nevada*, 35th Cong., 1st Sess, 1857-58, House Rpt. 375, Serial 966.
21. John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, January 18, 1858, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD.
22. Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey, From New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* (New York: C.M. Saxton, Barker & Co. and San Francisco: H.H. Bancroft & Co., 1860), 228-29.
23. The largest concentration of Brigham Young's letters to Delegate Hooper are to be found in William H. Hooper Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University. Discussion of the statehood petition appears throughout the correspondence for 1859-61 but especially in Brigham Young to Hooper, January 5, 1860, and January 3, 1861. The contingency plan is set forth in Brigham Young to Hooper, January 5, 1860, and February 21, 1866, Hooper Collection, Beinecke Library, as well as in Hooper to Brigham Young, April 8, 1860, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. In some cases the dates of letters contained in both of these collections differ by a day or two because of a lag between the production of a rough draft (which was often the retained copy) and the mailing of the finished letter. In such cases the latter date is cited.
24. Brigham Young to William H. Hooper, April 12, 1860, Hooper Collection, Beinecke Library.
25. Brigham Young to William H. Hooper, March 8, 1860. The original of this letter is at Beinecke Library and the retained copy at LDS-CHD.
26. William H. Hooper to Brigham Young, April 8, and March 27, 1860, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD.
27. Brigham Young to William H. Hooper, April 26, and May 3, 1860, Hooper Collection, Beinecke Library.
28. Salt Lake City *Mountaineer*, December 8, 1860. This editorial was probably written by James Ferguson, one of the



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newspaper's three Mormon lawyer-founders and the Nauvoo Legion's adjutant general.

<sup>29</sup> See also Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 49-68.

<sup>30</sup> William Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado, The Making of a Western Landscape 1860-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 219-52.

<sup>31</sup> U.S., Congress, House, *Jefferson Territory...*, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., 1859-60, House Misc. Doc. 10, Serial 1063, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *The Far Southwest 1846-1912, A Territorial History* (Yale University Press, 1966), 220, and Lamar to MacKinnon, August 10, 1995.

<sup>33</sup> One of the studies most helpful to understanding how the eastern half of Utah's "notch" (the area bounded by the crest of Rockies and the 110th meridian of west longitude as well as by the 41st and 42nd parallels of north latitude) was acquired successively by Nebraska, Idaho, Dakota and Wyoming territories is Albert Watkins, "Nebraska, Mother of States," *Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society* 17 (1913): 51-52. What obscures this chain of events today is that the final disposition of this parcel was part of Wyoming's 1868 creation as well as the fact that the names of the first two territorial owners after Utah – Nebraska and Dakota – are now attached to states the lines of which are hundreds of miles east of the Green River district.

<sup>34</sup> With hindsight, it is likely that Messrs. Hooper and Young would have expected that Utah Territory's northeast border would have been altered in March 1861 by a northward extension of the new Colorado's western boundary – the 109th meridian – into Nebraska, thereby giving Utah a square corner defined by the 109th meridian and 42nd parallel. This would have meant Utah's loss of territory in the northeast between the crest of the Rockies and the 109th meridian, but at least it would have been a change consistent with what had happened to her border further south with the establishment of Colorado. Instead, at the 41st parallel Utah's new frontier jogged west from the 109th to the 110th meridian and then moved north to the 42nd parallel, the line then shared with Oregon Territory (later Idaho).

<sup>35</sup> The question of which territory had political jurisdiction over the important, Mormon-operated Green River ferries and why is discussed in Daniel H. Wells to Lewis Robison, August 7, 1861, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. President Wells was Brigham Young's second counselor as well as the lieutenant- general commanding the Nauvoo Legion; Robison was the church's long-standing agent in the Green River-Fort Bridger area. President Young's instructions to his delegate and reference to a "blunder of a degree square on our northeast corner" are in Brigham Young to John M. Bernhisel, September 21, and December 30, 1861, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. One wonders whether this incident played a role in the decision that Bernhisel should stand for election to replace Hooper as delegate during the summer of 1861 or whether the change was simply a matter of the relative health of the two men – Bernhisel's improved by two years at home in Great Salt Lake City and Hooper's weakened by the same pressures that had led to Bernhisel's relief in 1859.

<sup>36</sup> Floor remarks in the U.S. House of Representatives by Delegate William H. Hooper, May 3, 1866, *Congressional Globe*, 39th Con., 1st Sess. (Washington: F. & J. Rives, 1866), Part 3:2368-70.

<sup>37</sup> Brigham Young to Dwight Eveleth, April 2, 1861, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. Although not well-known to historians, Elder Eveleth was a respected, effective agent of the LDS church in San Francisco to whom President Young often turned to get things done.

<sup>38</sup> Brigham Young to Walter Murray Gibson, April 2, 1861, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. Gibson, a recent convert in 1861, was perhaps second only to John Cook Bennett in his meteoric rise to power and notoriety in the LDS church before his excommunication. It was Gibson who in 1858 had merchandised a scheme for LDS mass migration to an island in the Dutch East Indies to first President Buchanan and then President Young. Subsequently Gibson migrated to the Kingdom of Hawaii, where he became the queen's foreign minister and created such havoc in the LDS Hawaiian mission that an apostolic delegation had to travel from Utah to terminate Gibson's leadership and restore order.

<sup>39</sup> Frankie Sue Del Papa, ed., *Political History of Nevada* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1990), 96. I am indebted to Professor W. Paul Reeve of Southern Virginia University for bringing this constitutional oddity to my attention.

<sup>40</sup> Brigham Young to Stephen A. Douglas, May 2, 1861, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. Although this remarkable letter was signed "Utah" rather than with President Young's name, the tone, substance, and location of the rough draft together with President Young's periodic use of aliases when directing hostile messages to enemies leads to the assumption of his authorship. An example of such behavior was his instruction to Delegate Hooper as to how to send a threatening letter under an assumed name to former Judge Cradlebaugh in Nevada. (See Brigham Young to William H. Hooper, February 23, 1862, Hooper Collection, Beinecke Library) A very similar reference to Douglas as a barking dog had appeared in the church's rebuttal to his Springfield speech, *Deseret News*, September 2, 1857. No copy of this letter can be found in the Stephen A. Douglas Papers, University of Chicago Library. Fort Sumter fell on April 13, and Douglas died on June 3, 1861. Joseph Smith's May 18, 1843 prophecy, delivered

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personally to Douglas following a dinner meeting in Illinois, was: "Judge, you will aspire to the presidency of the United States; and if you ever turn your hand against me or the Latter-day Saints, you will feel the weight of the hand of the Almighty upon you; and you will live to see and know that I have testified the truth to you; for the conversation of this day will stick to you through life." *Deseret News*, September 24, 1856 and September 2, 1857.

41. Lincoln's comment, made during a White House interview with T.B.H. Stenhouse, appears in George U. Hubbard, "Abraham Lincoln as Seen by the Mormons," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 31 (Spring 1963): 103. Hubbard's fine article is one of the few studies to take note of Lincoln's June 26, 1857 rebuttal of Douglas's earlier speech about, among other subjects, Utah affairs, 95-6.

42. E.B. Long, *The Saints and the Union, Utah Territory during the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), and Brigham D. Madsen, *Glory Hunter, A Biography of Patrick Edward Connor* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990).

43. Nevada's clash with California – known variously as the Roop County War, the War of Injunctions, or the Sagebrush War – arose because congress had defined the State of California's eastern boundary differently than it subsequently defined Nevada Territory's western frontier, a matter not resolved until a definitive survey was agreed upon in 1865. Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 74-75.

44. John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, April 4, 1862, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD.

45. John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, April 4, and August 30, 1862, *Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD*

46. Albert L. Fisher, "Boundaries and Utah: Sense or Nonsense?" 127.

47. The punitive, Reconstruction-oriented tone of federal-Mormon relations following the Civil War is reflected in the titles of two relevant articles: Richard D. Poll, "Political Reconstruction of Utah Territory 1866-1890," *Pacific Historical Review* 27 (May 1958): 111-26, and Everett L. Cooley, "Carpetbag Rule, Territorial Government in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 26 (April 1958): 107-20.

48. Whether current efforts in Salt Lake City, Carson City and Washington will succeed in transferring the town of Wendover, Utah, to West Wendover, Nevada, – and presumably bring with it a change in the 114th meridian as the unbroken state line – remains to be resolved. In this case, as with motivations during the 1850s/60s, the interest is economic, although currently it takes the form of access to gambling revenues rather than possession of gold and silver deposits. Presumably, this shift might mollify those Nevadans who believe that their state was short-changed by two miles on the east because of Congress's nineteenth-century practice of describing meridians of longitude in terms of a prime meridian running through Washington rather than Greenwich, England. Del Papa, *Political History of Nevada*, 96-98.

49. For a caustic, sarcastic description of this affair, see George A. Smith to William H. Hooper, January 24, 1869, Historian's Office, Letterpress copybooks, Vol. 2, 764, LDS-CHD.

50. Floor remarks in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. James M. Ashley, May 3, 1866, *Congressional Globe*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: F. & J. Rives, 1866), part 3: 2368-70. So ill-informed were some congressmen about western and Utah affairs that in response to this assertion by Ashley an Illinois representative commented: "I would like to know who President Young is." *Congressional Globe*, 1866, 2368-70.

51. The best summary and assessment of the congressional aspects of the 1866 border shift is W. Paul Reeve, "'By All Means Give Nevada a Slice': Americanization and the Remapping of Mormons and Southern Paiutes, 1866-1873," unpublished paper for Mormon History Association's 2002 Tucson annual meeting, 8-10. This paper is based on Reeve's equally useful 2002 Ph.D. dissertation for the University of Utah's history department, "Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes: Making Space on the Nineteenth-Century Western Frontier." The May 1866 floor comments of Delegate Hooper and Rep. Delos Ashley of Nevada are found in both Reeve's paper and dissertation as well as *Congressional Globe*, 1866, 2368-70.

52. *Salt Lake Telegraph*, October 31, 1867.

53. Reeve, "'By All Means Give Nevada a Slice'..." 19-21. George A. Smith to William H. Hooper, January 24, 1869, LDS-CHD.

54. T.A. Larson, *History of Wyoming* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 120, and Morgan, *The State of Deseret*, 115.

55. George Q. Cannon to Brigham Young, March 6, 1876, Brigham Young Collection, LDS-CHD. The tone of this letter is far

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more mellow than Cannon's earlier work on the opposite coast as the fiery young editor of the San Francisco *Western Standard* on the eve of the Utah War. See Roger R. Ekins, *Defending Zion, George Q. Cannon and the California Mormon Newspaper Wars in 1856-1857* (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 2002).

56. See for example an account of the unsuccessful visit to the Arizona territorial legislature by Utah "commissioners" seeking to exchange land for cash in *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, March 8, 1897, LDS-CHD; and the memorial and petitions seeking the Arizona Strip forwarded to Congress by Salt Lake City's Commercial Club on behalf of southern Utahns, Salt Lake City *Herald*, April 9, 1902. Also relevant is the January 27, 1909 petition to Congress by Utah's governor and state legislature as well as the immediate March 3, 1909 rebuttal by Arizona's legislative assembly, *Congressional Record*, 60th Cong., 2nd Sess. (February 6, 1909), Vol. 43, Part 2, 197, and *Congressional Record*, 61st Cong., 1st Sess. (March 16, 1909), Vol. 44, Part 1, 52. Malcolm L. Comeaux, "Attempts to Establish and Change a Western Boundary," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 72 (June 1982): 265-67.

57. Ironically and with consummate poor timing, the LDS church reversed direction on the mining issue and purchased both mines and claims in Nye County, Nevada during the 1890s with disastrous financial results. Leonard J. Arrington and Edward Leo Lyman, "The Mormon Church and Nevada Gold Mines," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 4 (Fall 1998): 191-205.

58. Until May 1858, Brigham Young held firmly to the mistaken notion that the deserts of western Utah (now central Nevada) contained large, hidden oases that could be used as refuges for mass LDS flight from the advancing Utah Expedition. Clifford L. Stott, *Search for Sanctuary, Brigham Young and the White Mountain Expedition* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984).

59. W. Paul Reeve cites the lack of stewardship of Gov. Charles Durkee as a case study of the extent to which Utah's appointed governors during this period focused on their personal well-being rather than on a defense of Utah's territorial integrity. In 1866 Durkee was preoccupied with his \$8,000 investment in Pahrnagat's "Green Monster" mine and even petitioned President Johnson for a months-long leave of absence so that he might leave Utah to visit his distant claim once it was established that it lay in Nevada rather than Utah. See Reeve dissertation, "Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes" (Chapter Two, "Power, Place, and Prejudice").

60. Leonard, "The Mormon Boundary Question," 136, and Leonard J. Arrington, *History of Idaho* (Moscow/Boise: University of Idaho/Idaho Historical Society, 1994), I, 271. A contrary view, and the assertion that in re-colonizing what is now southeastern Idaho in the early 1860s "Brigham Young wanted to keep Utah's borders as large as possible, enhancing the safety of the center," appears in Lawrence G. Coates, Peter G. Boag, Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler, and Merwin R. Swanson, "The Mormon Settlement of Southeastern Idaho, 1845-1900," *Journal of Mormon History* 20 (Fall 1994): 49-50. See also Donald W. Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 191-220.

61. President Young's correspondence during the Utah War of 1857-58 indicates that among the options he considered but rejected were a wholesale flight to Vancouver Island, Alaska, Mexico, Montana's Bitterroot Valley (and perhaps beyond), an island in the Dutch East Indies, and coastal Nicaragua. A review of Thomas L. Kane's papers at Brigham Young University indicates that during the polygamy persecution of subsequent decades exodus to some of those or other refuges was also quietly considered.

62. Arrington, *History of Idaho*, I, 213.

63. Allen, "The Evolution of County Boundaries in Utah," 261, and LeRoy R. Hafen, "The Counties of Colorado: A History of Their Creation and the Origin of Their Names," *The Colorado Magazine* 8 (March 1931): 48-60.

64. For an example of the arbitrariness and misinformation permeating the territorial naming process in Congress, see Arrington, *History of Idaho*, I, 214-15.

65. It is interesting that at about the time that Utah lost territory to Nevada and Wyoming, even a defeated Texas was able to repel attempts to split off her western region as a State of Coyote. Ernest Wallace, *The Howling of Coyotes, Reconstruction Efforts to Divide Texas* (College Station: Texas A. & M. Press, 1979). Even the creation of a new state from Virginia's western counties has not gone unchallenged, as with Jason Kesavan and Michael Stokes Paulsen, "Is West Virginia Unconstitutional?" *California Law Review* 90 (March 2002): 291-400.

66. Glen M. Leonard, unpublished "Commentator Remarks" for "Shifting Sands: 19th-Century Borderlands and the Changing Boundaries of Nevada, Utah and Arizona," a panel at Mormon History Association's 2002 Tucson annual meeting. See also Earl S. Pomeroy, *The Territories and the United States, 1861-1890* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969).

67. Editorial "Utah" *St. Louis Missouri Republican*, January 31, 1858.

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